

NEWS from the T&I DEMOCRATS

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Democratic Caucus

U.S. House of Representatives, 2163 Rayburn HOB, Washington, DC 20515

www.house.gov/transportation_democrats

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T&I Dems Question FAA on Airspace Decisions *Budget, organizational issues cloud modernization plans*

WASHINGTON—House Democrats on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee have some tough questions for FAA Administrator Marion Blakey and her agency's efforts to modernize the nation's airspace management.

In a letter sent to the Administrator today, Rep. James L. Oberstar (Minn.), Ranking Democratic Member on the Committee, and Rep. Jerry F. Costello (Ill.), Ranking Member of the Aviation Subcommittee, asked for answers about the Administration's plans to transform the National Airspace System (NAS). The two Members asked how the Administration's budget priorities match the stated goals of the FAA to modernize NAS.

"[W]e believe that reduced spending on new air traffic management technologies may undercut efforts to deliver a Next Generation Air Transportation System (NGATS) that will meet anticipated future demands for air travel," the letter reads, in part. "While Secretary Mineta has pledged to '...harness technology in a way that triples the capacity of our aviation system over the next 15 to 20 years,' we remain concerned that there is a serious disconnect between the rhetoric and resources being applied to a key issue facing the Nation."

The letter states that the Administration's is not providing sufficient capital funds to begin the modernization, freezing funding for new technologies in FAA's capital investment program (CIP) for the next five years.

"The Department of Transportation Inspector General (DOT IG) has reported that, '...most of the [FAA's] current \$2.5 billion capital account goes for keeping things running (sustainment), not new initiatives,'" Oberstar and Costello wrote. "In addition, the DOT IG has reported that 'although NGATS capital costs are undefined, FAA data suggests that NGATS would require \$3.5 billion between FY 2008—2012 over and above the Administration's current 5-year CIP.'"

The letter also questioned whether there was sufficient coordination between two key offices, the Joint Planning and Development Office (JPDO) and FAA's Air Traffic Control Organization (ATO).

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“[W]e believe that it is particularly important to both ensure the coordination of and to clearly define the roles and responsibilities between JPDO and FAA’s ATO. The JPDO’s planning must build upon the ATO’s existing modernization program, and the ATO’s near-term planning horizon must be aligned with the JPDO’s longer-term mission to transform the NAS.”

The letter queries the FAA regarding whether the two agencies could be restructured to provide better coordination, either by appointing the Chief Operating Officer of ATO to concurrently serve as Director of JPDO, or elevating the JPDO Director to the level of Deputy Administrator within the FAA.

The Aviation Subcommittee had planned to take up some of these issues at an oversight hearing on air traffic control modernization earlier this week, but the hearing was postponed to a later date, prompting Oberstar and Costello to write to Blakey directly with their questions.

Read the Oberstar-Costello letter at
[www.house.gov/transportation democrats](http://www.house.gov/transportation_democrats)

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